THE EFFECT OF A CONTRASTIVE APPROACH TOWARDS TEACHING PRAGMATICS AND CULTURE ON THE LEARNER'S AWARENESS OF THE L2 PRAGMATIC NORMS

HALIMEH MOHAMMAD MAHMOUDI[1] & MOJTABA REZAEI SANI[2]

[1]M. A Scholar (Under the Supervision of Dr. Afraz), Department of English, Qeshm International Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qeshm, Hormozgan, Iran

[2]Department of English, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Since the concept of communicative competence gained momentum, teaching pragmatics in the language courses could also receive more attention. In the early language teaching studies, the conveyance of pragmatic features to students was expected to happen in an implicit manner, but when importance of teaching pragmatics and teaching culture was known to teachers, the idea of explicit came into being. Being aware of some of deficiencies in explicit teaching approach in creating pragmatic awareness in students, the present study has adopted an initiative through juxtaposing L1 and L2 pragmatic features for the more effective teaching of these features.

KEYWORDS: Contrastive Pragmatics, Communicative Competence, Implicit & Explicit Teaching, Pragmatic Features, Pragmatic Awareness Teaching Culture

INTRODUCTION

Teaching pragmatic features of L2 is one of the most widely discussed issues in the recent investigations in language teaching. Up to the last two decades of the 20th century, there was little emphasis among teachers and textbooks on teaching of pragmatic features to students. Pragmatic aspects of the language were supposed to be conveyed in an implicit manner along with semantic and syntactic activities of the students. But later, when the idea of communicative competence gained momentum in literature, teaching and emphasizing on pragmatic features also came to the forefront. Therefore, explicit teaching received more attention and lots of research was done in this area. The present study believes that even the explicit approach does not suffice in order to create enough awareness in students. Accordingly an initiative is contrived through juxtaposing L1 and L2 pragmatic features. This is to compensate the inadequacies of the methods presented in the previous studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Pragmatic Features and Its Significance

According to Wei (2005:56), language has a dual character: both as means of communication and a carrier of culture. Language without culture is unthinkable, so is human culture without language. A particular language is a mirror of a particular culture.

Brown (1994:165) describes the relation between language and culture as follows: "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without

losing the significance of either language or culture". In a word, culture and language are inseparable (cited in Jiang, 2000: 328). When it comes to the realm of teaching and learning, as Gao (2006) presents it, the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning is so evident that one can conclude that language learning is culture learning and consequently, language teaching is cultural teaching (p.59). Gao further states that foreign language teachers should be aware of the place of cultural studies in foreign language classroom and attempt to enhance students' cultural awareness and improve their communication competence. Wang (2008), likewise, asserts that "foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers" (p.4).

According to Tomalin (2008), the international role of the English language and globalization are the two main reasons to teach culture as a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. "What the fifth language skill teaches you is the mindset and technique to adapt your use of English to learn about, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures. It involves understanding how to use language to accept differences, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things which might be different to yours. It is an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of language."

Tomalin (2008) further argues that teaching of culture in ELT should include cultural knowledge (knowledge of culture's institution, the big C), cultural values (the 'psyche' of the country, what people think is important), cultural behavior (knowledge of daily routines and behavior, the little c), and cultural skills (the development of intercultural sensitivity and awareness, using English language as the medium of interaction).

According to Spence-Oatey (2000:4), "culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, and basic assumptions and values that is shared by a group of people, and that influences each member's behavior and each member's interpretations of the meanings of other people's behavior". 'Culture' in language teaching and learning is usually defined pragmatically as a/the culture associated with a language being learnt. (Byram and Grundy, 2002; Farnia, M., Buchheit, L., and Banubinti Salim, Sh. (2010))

Admittedly, it is not an easy task to teach culture. Teachers can show the way rather than regulate a specific way of seeing things, which has the inclination of cultural imperialism. Making students aware of the important traits in the target culture, they realize that there are no such things as superior and inferior and there are differences among people of distinctive cultures, as well (Wang, 2008:4).

Kramsch (1993) argues that a foreign culture and one's own culture should be placed together for learners in order to understand a foreign culture. Learners' interaction with native speakers or text will require them to construct their own meanings rather than having educators simply transfer information about people and their culture. Therefore, non-native speakers should have opportunities to make their own meanings and to reflect on both the target culture and their own. Kramsch (1993) refers to this point as establishing a "sphere of interculturality". Moreover, what educators should always have in mind when teaching culture is the need to raise their students' awareness of their own culture (Straub, 1999) and 'the target culture' (Wei, 2005:55), to cultivate a degree of intellectual objectivity essential in cross-cultural analyses (Straub, 1999, cited in Wang, 2008:4).

Teachers and program developers are asked (Coleman, 1996; Holliday, 1996; McKay, 2002) to take the learners' sociocultural background into consideration in choosing materials and pedagogical approaches for particular contexts of

teaching since ignoring the students' norms and expectations – that is, what students bring to the classroom- is denying the learners' experiences (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005:100). Thus, a lack of consideration of variations in cultures of learning can lead to frustration and subsequent failure in language classrooms (Li, 1998; Holliday, 1994; Rueda, 2006). Mastering in a language requires learners' mastery of the cultural contexts in which the language occurs (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996:27 in Peterson and Coltrane, 2003; Heidari, Rezazadeh, EslamiRasekh,. (2009)).

Several questions are raised when it comes to the role of culture in language classrooms: "When should teachers teach culture? How should culture be taught? Why is it necessary for students to learn about the target culture at all?" (Fleet, 2006:5; Vitale, 2006). How can teachers incorporate culture into foreign language classrooms in terms of fostering learners' cultural awareness and communicating insights into the target culture; how to teach culture for effective language learning?" (Wang, 2008:3).

Issues of interaction and culture are integral elements of language teaching. Learners must not only be aware of language, but they must be taught how language is actually used in everyday interaction and what is characteristic in a given culture (Dufva, 1994).

Pragmatic Awareness

Pragmatic awareness (i.e. knowledge about language use in the target culture (Dufva, 1994:21) is very important from the point of view of social interaction. It is often claimed that pragmatic features of a language can be taught only 'after the students have learned the basic grammar', however, Dufva (1994) believes that pragmatic awareness ensures that "the first attempts to communicate in a foreign language are likely to be successful" (p.21)

There are two types of approaches in pragmatic studies, i.e. sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic. These terms were first employed by Leech (1983: 10-11) and then elaborated by Blum-Kulka (1997: 55-56), who explains that in sociopragmatic studies, the focus is on the choice of strategies across different situations, examining the way in which pragmatic performance is subjected to social and cultural conditions, whereas in pragmalinguistic studies, the focus is on examining the linguistic realizations in a particular language for conveying a specific pragmatic function. Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language (Krasner, 1999). Language learners need to be aware, for example, of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone. They should know that behavior and intonation patterns that are appropriate in their own speech community may be perceived differently by members of the target language speech community. They have to understand that, in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behaviors (Peterson and Coltrane, 2003; Cohen, A. D. (2008)).

Talking about pragmatics, many culture-specific pragmatic features are implicit, but they are nonetheless central in communicative encounters. Some examples of culture-specific features would include mental sets (Sternberg, 1995, cited in Žegarac and Pennington: 2000: 166), schemata (Yule, 1996:88), scripts (Yule, 1996:87), speech events (Yule, 1996:57), sociocultural norms (Barraja-Rohan, 2000:65), linguistic etiquette (Kasper, 1997:381), and pragmatic accent (Yule, 1996:88, cited in Pohl, 2004).

According to Thanasoulas (2001), more specifically, the teaching of culture should make learners aware of speech acts, connotations, etiquette, that is, appropriate or inappropriate behavior, as well as it should provide them with the opportunity to act out being a member of the target culture. Besides, foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers; therefore, they need to have the ability to experience and analyze both the home and target cultures (Byram, Morgan and Colleagues, 1994; Urano, 2000). Contrastive pragmatics is one of the many ways that can give teachers insight about differences of the two cultures.

Contrastive Pragmatics

Contrastive pragmatics compares the pragmatic systems of languages in cross-cultural contact. Speech Act theory, conversational routines and the theory of linguistic politeness are at the heart of contrastive pragmatics. Speech Act theory, proposed by its advocate Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) and Franch (1998), attempts to explain how speakers use language to meet intended actions and how hearers infer intended meaning from what is said. Nowadays speech act studies are considered a sub-discipline of cross-cultural pragmatics; however, they take their origin in the philosophy of language. Early classifications of speech acts identified five major categories of speech acts: 'representative' (a perceived truth condition of an utterance), 'directives' (a request to perform an action), 'commissives' (a commitment to carry out a future dispositions) and 'declarations' (an announcement that alerters a state of affairs). According to Wolfson (1981) (cited in Nelson, G., Al-Batal, and Echoles, E (1996)), "speech acts differ cross-culturally not only in the way they are realized but also in their distribution, their frequency of occurrence, and in the functions they serve" (p.123). Study of speech acts can provide the learners with a better understanding and new insights into the correlation between linguistic forms and sociocultural contexts (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Dafouz-Milne, E. (2008)). Furthermore, research on speech acts is crucial in that it can provide the appropriate sociocultural rules surrounding the utterances of native speakers (Murphy and Neu, 1996). This is the most important source and basis for sociopragmatic rules governing speech acts in a language.

One of the implications of doing contrastive pragmatics in language teaching is to make learners aware of pragmatic aspects of language use by analyzing their own language use and by looking for aspects of conducting speech acts that are in common or contrast between the first and target languages (Kondo, 2004:51; Amaya, L. F. (2008)).

This research takes a contrastive pragmatic approach to examine what implications the study of this type would offer to language learners.

Research Questions

RQ1. Does explicit presentation of pragmatic features of L2 results in better acquisition of these rules in comparison to implicit teaching?

RQ2. Does contrasting pragmatic features of L1 and L2 increases students' pragmatics knowledge more than mere presentation of them in the L2 system?

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Contrasting pragmatic features of L1 and L2 increases students' pragmatics knowledge more than mere presentation of them in the L2 system.

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Hypothesis 2: Explicit presentation of pragmatic features of L2 results in better acquisition of these rules in comparison to implicit teaching.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants were 20 Iranian EFL learners of English at a language institute in Shiraz, Iran. They were males and females adults studying at an intermediate level. The participants were all Persian speakers and had a similar language learning history and contact with English outside the classroom. However, they differed in terms of the period of time they had been studying English in the past and the purposes for which they are studying English. They were divided into two groups through random sampling; one forming the control and the other the experiment group.

Instrumentation

Interchange series were used as the textbook taught in the course. Control group received *Interchange* textbook and the experiment group received an adapted version of interchange with some added sections; these sections provided students with the differences and similarities between the pragmatic features of their mother language, Persian, and English language.

Location

The classes were intact classes of intermediate English in ILC English language institute in Shiraz.

Data Collection and Analysis (Procedure)

Pretest

In the inception of the term, a pretest will be given to the students in both the control and the experimental group to determine their awareness of the focused pragmatic features in the study. They will be asked to write dialogues to each other.

Treatment

The students will be taught five lessons within ten weeks of instruction. The control group will follow the routine activities presented in the textbook about pragmatic features of English. The experiment group will read books in which an appendix is added to each lesson comparing and contrasting different pragmatic features of Persian and English.

Posttest

At the end of the instructional period, participants will be asked to write similar dialogues to the ones used in the pre-test individually. One part of the post-test will include discourse-completion task. Students participated in an 18-session course of intermediate English language taught through *interchange series* by Jack C. Richards and Susan Proctor. They covered *Interchanged 1*, lessons 10 to 16. They read all of the lesson contents and did deferent parts such as conversation and grammar focus.

In the conversation part of the lesson, teacher provided them with some extra pages including instruction of the speech act of "expression of gratitude", along with pictures prepared in order to both let the students learn the intended

speech act better and also emphasize the pragmatic differences of speech act between Persian and English, which were in line with the content of the conversation of the intended lessons.

Group1 (Target Language Pragmatic Group) received only information about the pragmatic aspect of target language, especially through the pamphlets given to the students. These pamphlets were enriched with elaborations of the speech act of gratitude presented in their text books. The pamphlets included some extra conversation presented with colorful pictures and some explicit explanation on the context of use for these expressions; some suggestions of the optimum formulaic expressions were also offered on the pamphlet. Here students only received relevant information about target language pragmatic values. In fact, they did what is often done in the English courses who claim they have considered elements of pragmatic competence, based on the definition of Bachman (1990) and Bachman & Palmer (1996).

Group 2 (Contrastive Pragmatic Group), on the other hand, received a pamphlet which was specifically designed in a way that they juxtaposed the speech act of expression of gratitude both in Iranian culture, in which they were involved day and night in their quotidian interactions and the English presentation similar to what was given to group 1. Both Persian and English presentations were accompanied by explicit explanations which in the case of Persian brought into focus the taken-for-granted rules they applied through their daily interactions.

Group 3 (Control Group) followed the traditional method that expects students to learn pragmatic features automatically through encountering these features in the situations created in the textbooks and interactions in the class out of conversations. This is to learn pragmatic features in an implicit manner. Students followed the routine line of their learning trend through *interchange 1* textbook. They received no explicit explanation on the pragmatic features of L2. They were supposed to extract these features by themselves.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The effect of contrastive presentation of pragmatic features of L2 was measured by analyzing learners' pragmatic awareness in the post-test. To check our hypothesis as well as addressing all the research questions we applied the one-way ANOVA statistical test. Doing the one-way ANOVA we witnessed that the variability of (Between Groups (SS between = 468.868)) is greater than the variability of (Within Group (SS within=155.345)). This signifies that there is a difference in the groups in the results collected from the post-test.

Table 1: One-Way Anova

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pragmatic awareness	**Between Groups**	468.868	2	265.342	2.754	.000
	Within Groups	155.345	163	0.987		
	Total	**624.213**	**165**			

DISCUSSIONS

Knowing that the study has yielded new and hopeful results, we go through the two hypotheses and check them:

The first hypothesis of this study addressed the backbone question of the research, whether explicit teaching of

pragmatic features leads to better awareness in learners compared to the implicit presentation which was the automatic practice in the tradition. As was mentioned in the procedures, control group followed the conventional methods of implicit acquisition, but the experiment groups adopted the new initiative which was learning pragmatic features either through explicit presentation of L2 rules or through contrastive presentation of L1 and L2 pragmatic rules. Post-test and Pretest were scored from 0 to 20 based on the Iranian marking system. To check Hypothesis 1, pretest and post-tests of the three groups were compared by means of a matched t-test. Table 1 indicates the matched t-tests. The results for the control group posttest and pretest did not show a difference.

Table 2: Matched T-test of Pretest and Posttest for the Groups

Groups	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Significance
Experimental 1	Pretest	3.68	0.756	-25.887	0.000
	Posttest	8.5	2.045		
Experimental 2	Pretest	3.5	0.654	-28.876	0.000
	Posttest	9.00	0.632		
Control	Pretest	3.8	0.682	-2.345	0.000
	Posttest	4.2	0.627		

CONCLUSIONS

As the result of the analysis shows there is not much difference between the marks of students in control group before and after period of learning. The marks of students has increased a little which is normal since they have passed a course but with a traditional implicit approach towards pragmatic teaching. So we should have expected that learning would happen but retention of these pragmatic features after the span of three month was the focus of this study in which control group did not show so successful.

Experimental group 1 (Target Language Pragmatic Group) showed a dramatic change in the marks of the students. The *t* value (t= -25.887) indicated that the differences of pragmatic awareness after the instructional period which are gauged in the pretest and posttest were statistically significant.

Experimental group 2 (Contrastive Pragmatic Group) yielded results somehow similar to the group one. The t value (t=-28.876) suggests statistically significant difference in the pretest and posttest after the instructional period.

Table 3: Independent-Sample T-test of Computer-Based and Paper-Based Groups

Test	Group	N	M	t	Significance
Posttest of Pragmatic awareness	Experimental 1	20	8.5	1.687	0.000
	Experimental 2	20	9.0		

To put it in a nutshell, oth experimental groups showed remarkable changes in the posttest mark of the students which means they have learnt the intended pragmatic features with high awareness ability. The second Hypothesis addresses the question of superiority of one of them over the other. According to the independent-sample t-test in Table 3 Experimental group 2 (Contrastive Pragmatic Group) outperformed the target language pragmatic one. This was also supported in the post-interview done with the students of experimental 2. They found it more interesting and motivating to see how their mother language is different or similar to the second language they are in the process of learning, as some of

them found it 'quite a lot of fun'. Now that the differences of pragmatic features have been brought to the forefront for the students, they have become very excited about it and they try to ask each other about these differences.

The results of the posttest also showed that the students of the contrastive group were more competent in the pragmatic aspects of the features they were intended to learn during the semester.

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